

VZCZCXYZ0002
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHFR #1587/01 1091532
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 191532Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6626
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3728
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1213
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 001587

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [IV](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: FRENCH REMAIN WARY, INTEND TO
REMAIN ENGAGED

REF: A. ABIDJAN 347
[1](#)B. PARIS 1067

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt,
1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: MFA Cote d'Ivoire desk officer Charlotte Montel said on April 18 that outward signs in Cote d'Ivoire remained positive but that France remained wary that the situation could take a turn for the worse. The GOF was not convinced of President Gbagbo's good intentions over the long term and questioned the motives behind PM Soro's decision to work alongside Gbagbo. While France was thankful that the Ouagadougou Accord provided a framework for a drawdown of Operation Licorne, Montel said that France would remain engaged in Cote d'Ivoire -- "don't think we are cutting and running." Montel denied that Minister-Delegate Girardin's absence at the April 13 IWG meeting in Abidjan -- monthly meetings where she had been a driving force -- indicated flagging French engagement. Gbagbo also had a stake in preserving a French commercial presence, even as he cheered at the departure of French troops. Montel stressed the need for the international community to work together to ensure a smooth transition. She commented that the political class in Paris, on the eve of presidential elections, was relieved that Cote d'Ivoire had not turned into a campaign issue, and that France, post-Chirac, would not likely be faced with an immediate new crisis there. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Charlotte Montel, MFA desk officer for Cote d'Ivoire, on April 18 provided a review of events since the Ouagadougou Accord. She said that, to everyone's pleasant surprise, events were unfolding positively, citing Force Nouvelle leader Guillaume Soro's decision to become Prime Minister, the termination of the Zone of Confidence, and other measures indicative of an end to the long civil war and partition of the country. Having been among those most interested in resolving Cote d'Ivoire's problems as well as a direct participant in many recent pivotal events (the November 2004 bombing incident, for example), France was in no position to offer much public criticism of developments

since Ouagadougou, Montel observed. "At least on the surface, Gbagbo's done a lot that we've wanted him to do, or hoped he would do."

"TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?"

[1](#)3. (C) Still, she said, French wariness remained high. "It has almost been too good to be true," Montel commented. French concern centered on Gbagbo's real intentions and whether or not he was committed to democratic reform, she

said. He had proven to be an adept survivor and skillful manipulator of events and perceptions, generally in ways that enhanced his own power and the likelihood that he would retain it. She wondered as well how Gbagbo had enticed Soro to work with him and about the possible promises and deals they had arranged for their mutual benefit. Montel said that there was much that did not add up but that it was hard to criticize the unity they presented to the public.

FRANCE TO REMAIN ENGAGED

¶4. (C) Montel emphasized that France would remain engaged in Cote d'Ivoire and that post-Ouagadougou indications (in some cases generated by French officials, e.g., reftels) that France would seek a quick exit had unfortunately sent the wrong signals. Montel said that one had to bear in mind that for several generations, Cote d'Ivoire had been one of France's colonial jewels in Africa, and continued to serve as a major, if not the major, hub of France's African presence after decolonization. Many Quai diplomats had worked on or served in Cote d'Ivoire during their careers. There was a strong institutional attachment to it running through the MFA, and there were many French businesses, institutions, and private citizens with longstanding ties as well. "Don't think we are cutting and running," she stressed. The Ouagadougou Accord provided a framework for a drawdown of Operation Licorne, but the French would continue all commitments to UNOCI and undertake to fulfill Licorne's other missions.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY NEEDS TO WORK TOGETHER

¶5. (C) In that regard, Montel said that the international community needed to stay focused and work together. The end-game in Cote d'Ivoire, if indeed that phase had begun,

needed to be coordinated carefully so that UNOCI, Licorne, the elections process, the Special Representative's office, and other international players remained in synch and continued to function effectively as events warranted. Tensions had perhaps dropped but that did not mean that the several elements of the international community operating in Cote d'Ivoire could all relax or become inattentive and distracted by other problems.

¶6. (C) Montel said that the absence of Brigitte Girardin (Minister-Delegate for Cooperation, Development, and Francophonie) at the April 13 International Working Group meeting should not be viewed as a lessening of French interest either in Cote d'Ivoire or in the IWG. Montel explained that Girardin did not attend the meeting because of the French presidential election campaign (first round of voting on April 22) and because Girardin, according to Montel, "had gotten tired of being one of the few, if not the only, minister-level representative at what was supposed to be a ministerial-level forum." Girardin decided that she could afford to skip the April 13 meeting.

FRENCH POLITICS

¶7. (C) Montel confided that Girardin had in effect become the MFA's point person for all of sub-Saharan Africa. Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy was neither experienced nor interested much in Africa, save for the occasional high visibility issue (e.g., Sudan/Darfur) or something that touched on health care (he is a physician) or child soldiers (one of his special interests). Girardin's oversight over cooperation and development allowed her to take on the Africa portfolio rather smoothly. Montel noted that Girardin was a close personal ally of President Chirac and had few ties with leading presidential contender Sarkozy, meaning that it was not likely she would obtain a high position in a Sarkozy government. Montel said that Girardin had been concerned that Cote d'Ivoire not explode into a crisis during these final months and weeks of the campaign, both to spare Chirac during his last days in office and to avoid the new government's having to deal with a crisis upon entering office. In that sense, all concerned were glad that Cote

d'Ivoire had been relatively quiet since Ouagadougou.

¶18. (C) Gbagbo too would benefit from the change in leadership in France, Montel noted. The new team would arrive not having experienced first-hand the drama of the past few years, would encounter a happy and confident Gbagbo seen as having successfully steered his country through a difficult period, and might assume that the Cote d'Ivoire problem had thankfully and largely been "solved" prior to the new team's coming on board. "We will try to educate the new team on Cote d'Ivoire's many problems but there's only so much we can do without making the new team start viewing us as ineffective pessimists," Montel said.

FRENCH PRESENCE IN COTE D'IVOIRE

¶19. (C) Montel noted Gbagbo's campaign to woo French businesses and individuals who fled in 2004 to return to Cote d'Ivoire. "He may not want Licorne, but he sure wants our companies," Montel observed. She said that about 10,000 French left Cote d'Ivoire in 2004, out of about 18-20,000 then present. Those who left were either small single-proprietor business people or individuals working for large corporations obliged to protect their personnel. Those who remained were either Franco-Ivoirians or French expats who had lived in Cote d'Ivoire for many years and who were, along with their families and businesses, well integrated into Ivoirian society. Montel said there were no signs that the small-business community was interested in returning but she expected that those working for large corporations would return once big business decided that conditions permitted a resumption of operations.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: Montel took care to repeat on several occasions three points during her comprehensive briefing: 1) that uncertainty remains concerning Gbagbo's (and Soro's) long-term intentions; 2) that France welcomes the opportunities afforded by the Ouagadougou Accord, which includes possible drawdowns, but that it intends to remain engaged, to honor all of its commitments, and to consider carefully any changes in its present posture; and 3) that the international community needs to work together and remain in synch as it contemplates tying up loose ends if Cote d'Ivoire is indeed now entering the concluding phase of its civil war.

END COMMENT.

Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

WHITE